

VZCZCXRO8397  
RR RUEHIK  
DE RUEHBS #0092 0261654  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 261654Z JAN 10  
FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9939  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDHN/DIA DH WASHINGTON DC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS BRUSSELS 000092

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE PASS EUR/WE AND AF/C

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CG](#) [BE](#)  
SUBJECT: BELGIUM:FM VANACKERE CRITICIZED FOR MEETING KABILA  
BY FORMER FM DE GUCHT

REF: BRUSSELS 70

11. (SBU) All Belgian newspapers gave prominent coverage January 25 to the criticism levied by former Belgian FM Karel De Gucht on FM Steven Vanackere for meeting with Congolese President Joseph Kabila last week. FM Vanackere met with Kabila at his private estate in Lubumbashi, DRC on January 19 and was pictured holding a glass of beer with a smiling Kabila. During a Sunday talk show January 24, De Gucht sarcastically remarked, "I could not as a person drink a pint with Kabila. There is evidently less murder and rape in the eastern DRC, as I see how friendly Minister Vanackere raises a glass with Kabila." FM Vanackere responded through the traveling press prior to his return flight from Central Africa that his assignment on behalf of the Belgian government was to stabilize Belgian - Congolese relations and secure new influence in the DRC, allowing Belgium to improve the situation of the Congolese people. Vanackere then pointedly alleged that De Gucht's more outspoken style as foreign minister achieved few results during his tenure as foreign minister.

12. (SBU) De Gucht, currently EU Trade Commissioner, was an outspoken critic of the Kabila government during his tenure as foreign minister (2004-2009). The Congo suspended relations with Belgium from April to December 2008 after De Gucht made stinging public comments on corruption in the GoDRC. After De Gucht became Development Commissioner of the EU, he continued his critical approach to the Congo. As a result, De Gucht has been declared persona non grata in Kinshasa. The designation has not phased De Gucht, who has responded that Congolese officials are welcome to visit him in Brussels any time.

13. (SBU) Comment: Congo policy is a highly political issue in Belgium. The five-party Letermé II government and CD&V FM Vanackere view an improved relationship with Kinshasa as politically expedient prior to next years national elections and the 50th anniversary of the independence of the DRC. The Belgian public broadly supports engagement with the DRC (see reftel). The Letermé II government has also made the calculation that an improvement in the humanitarian and political situation is easier done through cooperation with the GoDRC and improved relations than through castigation. Now that De Gucht sits on the EU Commission rather than in the Belgian foreign ministry, he is simply continuing his long established habit of speaking his opinion freely. His comments will have no immediate effect on Belgian Central Africa policy. However, De Gucht's outspokenness may create a rift in his party, the Open VLD, which is a member of the government coalition. As such, its members who remain in the government must consider the effects of highly charged rhetoric on Belgium's current Congo policy and on the government's participation in the Congolese Independence

commemoration, including a possible visit by King Albert.

GUTMAN

.